

The Glory of Christmas
1st Sunday of Advent: Joseph

When our kids were little, setting a **precedent** was a **dangerous** thing to do. If you did something once or allowed some sort of freedom **once**, in their **manipulative minds** was to set a precedent. This is the **slippery slope** for parents. You must think because making a choice that you **believe has no lasting power** in your life, will become as **immovable as the constitution and the bill of rights** in your kids minds. What you said could happen in a **moment of weakness now has been chiseled in granite** until they are 18 and maybe even beyond.

Setting Precedent...An earlier action or event used as an example or guide for similar situations to come.

Dietrich was the most effective in turning a simple decision into precedent. During his brief, and not so illustrious band career sometime in 6th or 7th grade, we went to have **ice cream after a concert**. A simple thing, a way to celebrate and be together and enjoy the triumph of a band concert.

What we didn't know was that Dietrich had decided that precedent was set. Now and forever after we have ice cream after any band concert. It didn't matter if they played **one song badly or Beethoven's symphony**, we went to Dairy Queen. And to think of not doing that was as if we had **broken a minimum of 3 of the 10 commandments in that very moment**. It was as if **all of life up to this point was a lie**. A kid could no longer **count on anything or believe in anything** because this precedence was broken. Oh, the horror!

As the definition says, the **earlier action is an example or guide**. It can **be broken**. Particularly with people who don't want to go to Dairy Queen, but just want to go home, because the **Northeast MS gym is always 85 Celsius and the bleachers were designed by a 4 ft. tall sadist**. In other words, they were built to fit a small person and anyone who isn't the **size of a 3rd grader** will be really uncomfortable and may even deal with **dehydration and cramping**.

We could say, "No, we aren't going to DQ, I'm hot, sweaty, tired, and irritable" and it would not have been the end of the world. We wouldn't have made him happy, but it wasn't like we were sending him to **military school in the U.P.**

But when you are God, that's a different story. Setting a precedent isn't random or by accident. It's for a reason.

Here's a really strange precedent that God set early in scripture. It was, and still is, a real head scratcher.

God chooses the wrong person for the right thing.

He chooses the **least prepared, the least likely person.**

It's kind of like **Lions fans** usually feel after the NFL draft. The commissioner stands up and says, "And with the _____ pick the Detroit Lions choose..." There's a long pause, a pregnant pause, this is because Roger Gadel has never heard of this player and then he says, "**Bob Smith, tight end from the Our Lady of Perpetual Sadness College.**"

It's like asking a **5-year-old child to cook a gourmet meal**; there's fire, knives and a gas stove. This is the wrong person for the right thing.

Here's how God established this precedent in the very beginning of the bible and continued it straight through.

God chose Abraham (Gen. 12-22).

God calls him to leave his country and become a great nation. He is 75 and has no children. It was nearly 25 years later that he became a father for the first time. God made him the father of nations. **Wrong person for the right thing.**

God chose a guy named Jacob (Gen 25-35).

He was a cheater and a liar. God used him to bless many nations. **Wrong person for the right thing**

God chose Joseph (Gen 37-50).

He experienced **horrible abuse**, was trafficked, and experienced grave injustice. He was wrongly imprisoned. God used him to save Israel and other nations from famine. **Wrong person for the right thing**

God chose Moses.

The whole book of Exodus is about a stutterer who becomes the mouthpiece of God before Pharaoh, who enslaved the people of God. **God did supernatural miracles through him** to lead the people out of slavery, through the wilderness, and onto the doorstep of the promised land of Canaan. **Wrong person for the right thing.**

God chose a woman named Rahab (Joshua 2).

She was a prostitute, who God chose to assist the Israelites in capturing the **city of Jericho** that was a major factor in their moving forward in the Promised Land. **Wrong person for the right thing.**

God chose David.

He was an adulterer, murderer, abuses of power, impregnated a married woman. And yet he was called a man after God's heart. **The messiah would be from his family line** and the place where he was born was called **The City of David**. **Wrong person for the right thing.**

That's a precedent of picking the wrong person for the job.

Earlier, in the story of King David, the prophet comes to anoint one of Jesse's sons as the king of Israel, God's people. **This is the ultimate wrong person for the right thing.** Choose wisely. Pick the best candidate. Jesse walks by all of these strong, strapping, manly sons. but **God doesn't tell him, "This is my choice."**

So Jesse says, **there is my youngest, David, who is just a kid.** He is out tending my flocks. Jesse says, "Go get him." As soon as Jesse sees David walking toward him, this punk kid, who is given the job of watching sheep, God speaks clearly, "This is my choice." **Samuel says to the Lord, "This is a kid, he's the wrong person for the right job."** ⁷ **But the LORD said to Samuel, "Don't judge by his appearance or height, for I have rejected him.** (The prophet is saying that he has rejected the older ones who looked more qualified by outward appearance.) **The LORD doesn't see things the way you**

see them. People judge by outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." 1 Samuel 16:7

Samuel anoints David to be the king of Israel as a snot-nosed kid.

That brings us to the story of the birth of Jesus. Again, **God follows the precedent** in choosing the man who would play the role of the father of the Messiah, Joseph.

This is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Joseph, to whom she was engaged, **was a righteous man** and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement quietly. ²⁰ As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. "Joseph, son of David," the angel said, **"do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife.** For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. ²¹ And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." ²² All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord's message through his prophet: ²³ "Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means 'God is with us.'" ²⁴ When Joseph woke up, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded and took Mary as his wife. ²⁵ But he did not have sexual relations with her until her son was born. And Joseph named him Jesus. Matthew 1:18-25

Questions that left Joseph scratching his head.

- **How could I possibly be in a relationship like this?**
- **Who will ever believe a story like this** about a girl like Mary and a guy like me?
- **I never asked for a marriage like this.**
- **What will everybody think of me...of us?**
- **How can I be who God wants me to be when so much of this situation makes so little sense on the surface?**

Why would God decide to identify someone like Joseph to play the role of Jesus' earthly father? Answer: **Because God sets precedence**

throughout the Bible that shows His consistency in choosing the least likely people. **It's not random or accidental.**

Our Joseph character that was depicted in the video probably was not at all what the Joseph in the Bible story of Christmas was really like on many levels. However, he likely was similar on at least one front that was articulated by the director towards the end of the scene. Do you remember what was said about Joseph in the video?

"I understand that Joseph is radically under qualified for all he's about to encounter. But isn't that the type of people God uses? The most unlikely folks to do the biggest things. It seems like those are the ones he always picks because he is God who will never give up on us."

Ok, so I get that God chooses differently, unexpectedly, and not like us, but that doesn't tell us why. **Why this precedence? Why does God choose people like Joseph?**

Because they are not in a position to steal the glory.

None of the people in that long list, including Joseph, are in a position to say, "Yes, I did this."

Paul tries to explain it this way. ⁹ But he said to me, **"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."** Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. ¹⁰ That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong. 2 Corinthians 5:9-10 (NIV)

When we are weak, unqualified, in over our heads, that is when the power of Christ works through us. It is here that it becomes clear that the power is Gods. There can be no confusion about who made this happen.

Our sinful need for control and self-fulfillment is where pride comes in. Pride is when we think we've made it happen. **It demands that I get the credit because something in me needs validation.**

The problem is that there is a ceiling to my power and my glory. There is none for when it is Christ's power working through or resting on me. The sky's the limit.

Do you feel like you are in over your head? Do you feel like you are the wrong person for what is in front of you? Or maybe you have a sense of what God is calling you to and you say, "This is a really bad fit." It's another case of the wrong person for the right thing. That proves that you are much less likely to take the credit when God works through a broken mess like you.

This is how we get to the next reason God chose someone so not right for the job like Joseph is that...**God will receive the credit and glory, as He should.**

When the unqualified, ill fitting, bad choice person does something like save a nation, parent the messiah, then other people must look a little deeper. It no longer becomes about the Josephs and Moses of the world. It becomes about The One they associate themselves with.

Why do you feel unqualified to do what is on our plate in a way that gives to God the glory?

- Fear of the future.
- You feel inadequate to take care of your family like you think you should.
- Because you are in a dead end job.
- You feel stretched between taking care of kids and aging parents, or grandkids.
- You feel misunderstood.
- You feel burned unjustly by what was posted on social media.
- You feel in over your head with responsibilities that were not part of your plan.

Moving from a season of fear into a season of anointing, where we make the kingdom present for others and God, ultimately receives the glory.

You are the kind of person God desires to use to bring him great glory this Christmas and forward. Although you may feel like the most unlikely person to do something great for God, please do not give up on God this Christmas. **He wants you to know that, like Joseph, He desires you to trust him and not be afraid in your circumstances.** Day by day you can find courage and strength as you follow God's lead in your life to do what he wants you to do and say what he wants you to say.

You have been identified by God to be the only one in your unique circumstance and situation who can bring Him the kind of glory He uniquely desires from you this Christmas. If you feel like you are the only one who is **radically underqualified** to do such a thing, remember, part of the glory of Christmas is that **Christmas is about precedents from God.** He regularly uses those who find themselves in less than ideal circumstances to bring Him great glory. **You uniquely have been positioned to step into the moment** of this Christmas season, not be afraid, trust in God, and make yourself fully available to him, no matter what happens.

Remember, the angel of the lord said to Joseph in his dream, **"do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife."** **Matthew 1:20**

How would you fill in the blank this Christmas season as you think about your life and the responsibilities for you today? Don't be afraid to...

Why do it this way God? Why choose the wrong, least likely most under-qualified? They get a front row seat to see God's glory on display.

Think about all of the things Joseph got to see? He saw angels, the messiah in a manger, shepherds telling of angel choirs, Magi bearing gifts from a far away land. And then he saw Jesus grow, do miraculous things, teach about the kingdom of God, and, ultimately, die on a cross and walk out of a tomb. **He got to see all of that and he could have tapped out and no one would have blamed him because he wasn't qualified for the job.**

This is where people like us get to see the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of Bill is puny, but when I accept what God is calling me into or what he has in front of me, even though I'm wrong for the job, I get to see the kingdom coming on earth as it is in heaven.

When Joseph woke up, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded and took Mary as his wife. Matthew 1:24

Joseph didn't become a different person after making this decision to trust God. But God remained the same God who seems to always do it this way.

What about you and me? What is God saying to you right now?

Steps of Obedience:

1. Personalize this scripture.

⁹ But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you (Bill), for my power is made perfect in (your) weakness." Therefore **I** will boast all the more gladly about **my** weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on **me**. ¹⁰ That is why, for Christ's sake, **I** delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when **I** am weak, then **I** am strong. 2 Corinthians 5:9-10 (NIV)

This is where we view ourselves as a part of the precedence. I'm in this great line of under-qualified, wrong people for the right thing people in God's grand story.

2. Don't be afraid to...

This is where you fill in the space with what God has for you that scares you. Maybe it's just your life and the roles you must play. You just don't know if you can do it. You are afraid of parenting, how to live for Jesus in this culture, how to love the people around you who make this so difficult, how to go to work each day feeling trapped, and retirement...

3. And give God the glory!

Start with looking back for something that he got you through and begin advent by giving him the glory. Pick a person to tell that story to so they

can see that you give God the credit. Now look forward to what you wrote above. Give God the glory now for what he's going to do.